



Minnesota Identity Theft Freeze Law

From the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson

Obtaining credit has never been easier. We expect quick loans, which enable us to grab a surprise bargain or finance an emergency. Easy credit, however, makes for easy crime. The credit approval process often amounts to little more than matching two bits of information on an application – a name and a Social Security number – with a credit report.

Identity thieves hit pay dirt when they use their victim's good credit history to open a wide variety of new accounts, including credit cards, utility accounts, checking accounts, Internet accounts and more. The thieves skip out on the bills, and creditors unknowingly pursue the victims and destroy their credit in the process. This crime, known as "new account fraud," often costs businesses and consumers a significant amount of time and money because it takes much longer to discover and correct than "existing account fraud."

Minnesota's ID Theft Freeze Law

A Minnesota law that became effective August 1, 2006, helps citizens protect themselves from new account fraud. The law empowers any consumer to freeze his or her credit report by simply contacting a consumer reporting agency and requesting a credit report freeze. A credit report freeze will deny identity thieves access to the consumer's credit history and prevent them from obtaining new credit cards or loans under the consumer's name.

Any Minnesotan can impose such a freeze on his or her personal credit report for any reason. Victims of identity theft can have their credit reports frozen without charge. Non-victims can proactively freeze their credit report for a \$5 fee. When a credit reporting agency receives a freeze request, it must place the freeze within 3 days of the request, and provide a unique PIN to the consumer within 10 days of the request.

The consumer may then use the PIN to temporarily lift

or "thaw" his or her report for a specific period of time or for a specific creditor. For example, suppose that you are looking to purchase a new car. If you know that you want to buy the car from Dealership XYZ, you may contact the credit reporting agencies and allow that specific dealership to access your credit report. Or you may request that your credit report be accessible to any creditor for a specific period of time, such as 30 days, to give you time to shop at several dealerships. After the specified time, your credit report will automatically refreeze.

Be sure to keep the PIN in a safe place. If you forget your PIN, you can get a second one for free, but will have to pay \$5 for a third one. Like placing the freeze, victims of identity theft can thaw their credit reports without charge, while non-victims may be charged a \$5 fee.

Planning Ahead

When your credit file is frozen, **no one** will be approved for new credit. In order for you to obtain new credit, you must use your PIN and contact the credit reporting agencies to thaw your file. While credit reporting agencies are to thaw credit reports in an expedited manner, thawing your file may take up to three business days. Be sure to plan ahead and temporarily thaw your credit file before applying for credit.

Freezing your Credit Report

Because different credit issuers may use different credit reporting agencies, you will need to freeze your credit report with each of the three major credit reporting agencies. Each of the three credit reporting agencies has its own process for taking credit freeze requests. If you are a victim of identity theft, you will need to provide the credit reporting agencies with a copy of either the police report or case number documenting the theft to avoid the \$5 fee.

For instructions on how to request a credit freeze, consumers may contact the credit reporting agencies as follows:

Experian Security Freeze

PO Box 9554
Allen, TX 75013
(972) 390-4172

https://www.experian.com/consumer/security_freeze.html

Equifax Security Freeze

PO Box 105788
Atlanta, GA 30348
1-800-685-1111

<https://www.freeze.equifax.com>

TransUnion Security Freeze

PO Box 6790
Fullerton, CA 92834-6790
1-888-909-8872

<http://www.transunion.com/corporate/personal/fraudIdentityTheft/fraudPrevention/securityFreeze.page>

Credit reporting freezes are a defense in the fight against identity theft. As this crime continues its climb to the top of law enforcement charts, you can be proactive in protecting yourself from its expensive, time-consuming consequences by freezing your credit report.

For additional information about the law, to file a complaint, or for a copy of *Guarding Your Privacy: Tips to Prevent Identity Theft*, please contact the Minnesota Attorney General's Office as follows:

Office of Minnesota Attorney General

Lori Swanson

1400 Bremer Tower
445 Minnesota Street
St. Paul, MN 55101

(651) 296-3353 or 1-800-657-3787

TTY: (651) 297-7206 or 1-800-366-4812

www.ag.state.mn.us

Additional Tips

While there is no guaranteed way to stop a thief, there are ways to become a less attractive target:

- **Cancel all credit accounts you don't use.** When you open a new credit account, ask that a password is used before any changes or inquiries can be made.
- **Review statements.** Carefully review all bank and credit card statements, canceled checks, and phone and utility bills. Report any discrepancies.
- **Check your credit report.** You are entitled to a free copy of your credit report once each year. Make sure the report is accurate and includes only those activities you have authorized. Free annual reports may be requested the following way:

1) Logging on to:

www.AnnualCreditReport.com,

2) Calling:

1-877-322-8228.

3) Writing:

Annual Credit Report Request Service,
P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA., 30348

